

COVID-19: CDC Museum Closed to the Public

Due to ongoing concerns about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the David J. Sencer CDC Museum is closed to the public and will remain closed as we continue to assess and monitor developments. All CDC Museum tours are canceled until further notice.

This decision is being made out of an abundance of caution and based upon the guidance of the CDC regarding social distancing and the elimination of large gatherings.

Please continue to check our website and social media accounts for additional updates.



Emergency Preparedness and Response



Responding to Emergencies

This section of *The Story of CDC* exhibit addresses emergency response. CDC has played a key role in preparing the United States for public health threats that include natural, biological, chemical, radiological, and nuclear incidents. Response to public health emergencies in the late 1970s and early 1980s laid the foundation for the agency's preparedness activities and programs today. How we manage both natural and man-made risks before, during, and after emergencies is part of contemporary society, and is a critical component of CDC's public health mission. The exhibit shows three examples of CDC's emergency response work.



Love Canal, Three Mile Island, and Mount St. Helens

In August of 1978, then-President Jimmy Carter declared a federal health emergency after the [discovery of environmental toxic chemicals](#) in homes built over and around an industrial area that had been a chemical dump. CDC provided physical examinations and health studies of the Love Canal residents, although there was great distrust of the federal government at the time. CDC learned the importance of open communication during an environmental crisis. CDC's sister agency, the

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), grew out of the Superfund program established in 1980 to find and clean up the most hazardous sites in the country. Today, ATSDR is responsible for determining human health effects associated with toxic exposures.

In 1979, a nuclear power plant accident occurred at the Three Mile Island Unit 2 in Middleton, Pennsylvania. Within hours of the accident, CDC, with state and local health departments and the Food and Drug Administration, evaluated health risks of radiation, and later completed health surveys of those living within a five-mile radius of the reactor. After the accident, CDC was designated to coordinate the **Public Health Service response to environmental emergencies**, including disposal sites, transportation accidents, explosions, fires, and chemical spills.

There was also the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington state. The volcano's eruption was the worse volcanic event in United States history, causing 57 deaths and many injuries. CDC, with state and local health departments, clinics, and private institutions, carried out a **comprehensive epidemiological evaluation** of death and injury. CDC also studied **the toxicity of volcanic ash** to assess its potential health risks to residents and workers assigned to cleanup duties after the disaster. CDC continues to be ready to assist in responses to **natural disasters**.



Pre-9/11 Bioterrorism Planning

In the 1990s, the Oklahoma City bombing, the sarin gas subway attacks in Tokyo, and the anticipated “Y2K” computer meltdown were all factors leading to increased concern about U.S. preparedness. As the nation’s federal public health agency, CDC took the lead to enhance the U.S. capacity to respond to acts of **bioterrorism**.

In 1998, CDC launched the **Laboratory Response Network** to provide the highest level of laboratory expertise and support during responses to both natural and man-made emergencies. In 1999, the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile (now the **Strategic National Stockpile** [↗](#)) was established to ensure the rapid delivery of drugs and materials to public health emergency sites.

There are two photographs of the 12-hour Push Packages in the Strategic National Stockpile. These are pharmaceuticals, antidotes and medical supplies stored in secure warehouses around the country. They can be sent to any emergency site within 12 hours of the decision to send them.



9/11

CDC’s intense preparedness efforts were tested on September 11, 2011, when two commercial airplanes were intentionally crashed into the World Trade Center towers, destroying them and the surrounding areas of lower Manhattan. The New York City Department of Health immediately began to assess the public health and medical impact

Anthrax

On display is a diagram from the October 2002 issue of *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. The diagram illustrates the mail routes of letters and packages containing *Bacillus anthracis* spores processed by the U.S. Postal Service and delivered to news agencies in New York and Senate office buildings in Washington, D.C., among other places. Also on display is an envelope addressed to Senator Leahy, found unopened on November 16, 2001, in a barrel of unopened mail sent to Capitol Hill.



Emergency Operations Center

The use of CDC's old auditorium as a center of operations during the anthrax investigations highlighted the need for a state-of-the-art permanent **emergency operation center (EOC)**. CDC's first EOC, serving as a central control and coordination hub for epidemic outbreaks and other public health emergencies, opened in 2003 with the support of private donors. In 2005, a new, larger EOC was opened in CDC's new headquarters building, where responses to emergencies from Hurricane Katrina to the H1N1 pandemic have been coordinated. The image above features the EOC activated in response to COVID-19 in early 2020.

Enrichment Modules

SEE

Take a closer look:

- Learn more about different kinds of [health threats and emergencies](#) that CDC addresses and [how to protect yourself and your loved ones](#).
- Explore CDC's [Toxic Substances Portal](#) and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry [emergency preparedness resources](#).
- Find CDC preparedness resources for [radiation emergencies](#), [natural disasters and severe weather](#), and [bioterrorism emergencies](#).
- Read more about CDC's [World Trade Center Health Program](#).
- Get a visual of the [Three Mile Island](#) nuclear power plant, the site of a March 28, 1979 accident.
- Learn more about [what CDC is doing to prepare for an anthrax attack](#) and the different [types of anthrax](#). If you're still curious, check out this [Guide to Understanding Anthrax](#) .
- Explore an up-close [photomicrograph](#) of the Gram-positive, rod-shaped *Bacillus anthracis*
- Toxins produced by bacteria, fungi, and algae can, in theory, be used as bioterrorism weapons. Learn about these [toxins and CDC's response](#) .
- Explore initiatives of CDC's [National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases](#).
- Explore these CDC fact sheets covering [preparedness and response numbers](#)  and [disaster risk](#) .

HEAR

From the source:

- Read perspectives and personal experiences working on the front lines of emerging infectious diseases and public health emergencies in [CDC's Public Health Matters blog](#).
- Meet [Steve Ahrenholz](#) , CDC employee at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Health Hazard Evaluation Branch.
- Hear about how CDC responds during a [public health emergency](#).
- Explore the parallels between public health emergency responses and Gene Davis' paintings in this [Emerging Infectious Diseases cover story](#).
- Keep up with the latest emergency preparedness updates from CDC on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

REFLECT

Then and now:

- Learn about [health risks and lessons learned](#)  associated with 9/11 and the World Trade Center disaster.
- Explore the long [history of naturally occurring anthrax](#) from 700 BC to today.
- Learn what CDC's [Global Rapid Response Team](#) does and why their work is important.

DO

Give it a try:

- Find [resources to prepare yourself and your family](#) for natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and emergencies.
- Learn how to develop your own [emergency action plan](#).
- Learn how to [get involved and lead by example](#) within your community.

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